

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Ron Roberts

Introduction (Lesson 1)

For anyone who has ever gone to Sunday school, a mention of the book of Exodus conjures up images of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on dry land. People with little to no Bible knowledge even recognize the name Moses, and they're pretty sure he looks a lot like Charlton Heston. The burning bush, the 10 plagues, the escape from slavery, the desert wandering, and the 10 commandments: it's an exciting book, full of examples of God's omnipotence and power. It saddens me to know that the general consensus among today's scholars is that the events described in the Book of Exodus should *"best be understood as a myth and cannot be treated as history in any verifiable sense."*

Perhaps the most deplorable declaration comes from noted Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein in conjunction with American anthropologist Neil A. Silberman (University of Massachusetts) who jointly announced that archaeology has found no evidence to support even a small band of wandering Israelites living in the area around Sinai. Their conclusion: *"Repeated excavations and surveys throughout the entire area have not provided even the slightest evidence, therefore, the conclusion that the Exodus did not happen at the time and in the manner described in the Bible seems irrefutable!"* They continue: *"Instead of the mass exodus, modern archaeology suggests continuity between Canaanite and Israelite settlements, indicating a primarily Canaanite origin for Israel, with no suggestion that a group of foreigners from Egypt comprised early Israel."* Perhaps they were looking in the wrong place because later evidence proves that Mt. Sinai (the mount at which the Israelites were camped at its base) was NOT located in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula where it was traditionally thought to be, but rather, across the Gulf of Aqaba in what was then called Midian. Much new evidence and artifacts have been found over the last 50 years at this "new" location that certainly seem to prove that Mt. Sinai was never where it was traditionally thought to be.

Today's scholars have even decided Moses was not the author of the book of Exodus, as we have always been taught. Instead, these "experts" have determined that its initial composition was a product of legends told during the Babylonian exile in the 6th century BC and finally revised in the Persian post-exilic period of the 5th century BC.

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Wikipedia (which we know is more or less just public opinion) chimes in with this statement: *“While all but the most conservative scholars reject the biblical account of the Exodus, a majority still believes that the story has some historical basis, though disagreeing widely about what that historical kernel might have been.”* Dr. Kenton Sparks, (PhD. Eastern University) would certainly agree with this. He refers to the book of Exodus as *“mythologized history.”*

Interestingly enough, while Wikipedia appears to reject the exodus as a historical event, it does propose a date for its occurrence! That proposed date is 13th Century BC, with Ramses II sitting on the throne. Their dating is easy to prove incorrect, which we will see as we progress in our study. In fact, if my own Google search is any indication, there’s a lot of disagreement out there about where to place this event in history. The projected dates are all over the place: From 2000 BC all the way to 1200 BC. Fortunately, we don’t have to rely on Google to provide the answer. With the scriptures as our guide, we can establish with great accuracy the exact year in which the Israelites arrived in Egypt, and the exact year in which they left it behind, and we will do just that as we move along.

It is somewhat gratifying to know that not everyone who puts pen to paper is a skeptic. The historian quoted below is convinced it happened just as it is recorded in the bible. *“The Exodus from Egypt was not only the determining event in the history of the Jewish People, but was an unprecedented and unequaled catastrophe for Egypt. In the course of Pharaoh’s stubborn refusal to let the Israelites leave and the resultant plagues sent by God, Egypt was devastated: Hail, disease and infestations obliterated Egypt’s produce and livestock, while the plague of the first born stripped the land of its elite, leaving inexperienced second sons to cope with the economic disaster. And the drowning of the Egyptian armed forces in the Red Sea left Egypt open and vulnerable to foreign invasions.”*

Brad Aaronson, June 29, 2006)

I am neither a historian nor a scholar, but as a believer in the bible being the inspired word of God, I know we can not only regard this work as historical, but according to 2nd

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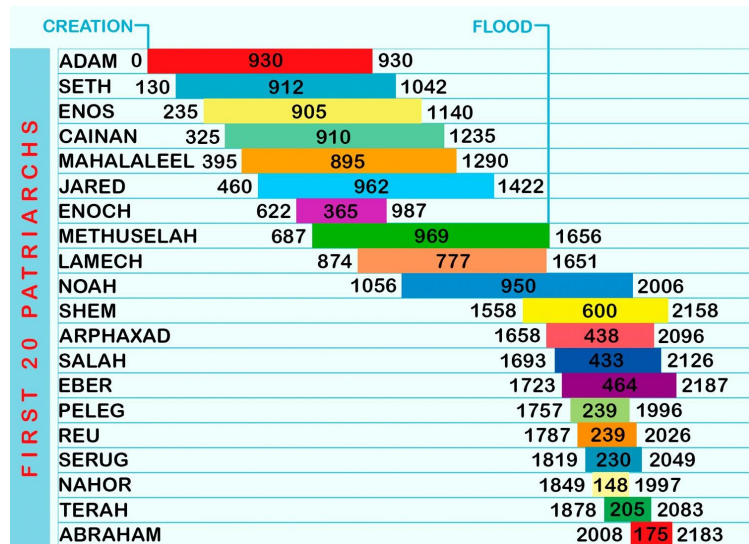
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Timothy 3:16, can continue to learn from it: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* And that is my intent for this study: To help us see an old story with new eyes, to learn how scripture and history overlap, and to better understand how to show these historical events play a key role in God’s overall plan for mankind’s eternal salvation.

Since Exodus is a continuation of the story of God’s elect found in Genesis, it stands to reason that the best introduction is the book of Genesis itself. Therefore, the remainder of this introduction will be a brief but comprehensive look at the events leading up to Exodus 1:1...

In the beginning God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a paradise beyond comprehension. Everything they needed to survive and thrive was in the garden where they co-existed peacefully with the animal kingdom. There was but one restriction: Do not eat the fruit of one certain tree. The serpent beguiled Eve and she ate of the forbidden fruit then convinced Adam to do likewise. Because of their transgression Adam and Eve were evicted from Paradise and were forced to sustain their lives by *“tilling the ground.”* (Gen. 3:23) After being exiled from the garden, Eve gave birth to two male children, Cain and Abel, and an unknown number of daughters. In a fit of anger, Cain killed his brother Abel and was sent away, finally relocating in a land east of the garden called Nod. Eventually, Eve gave birth to another son they named Seth, and it is through his lineage that the Messiah would eventually come.

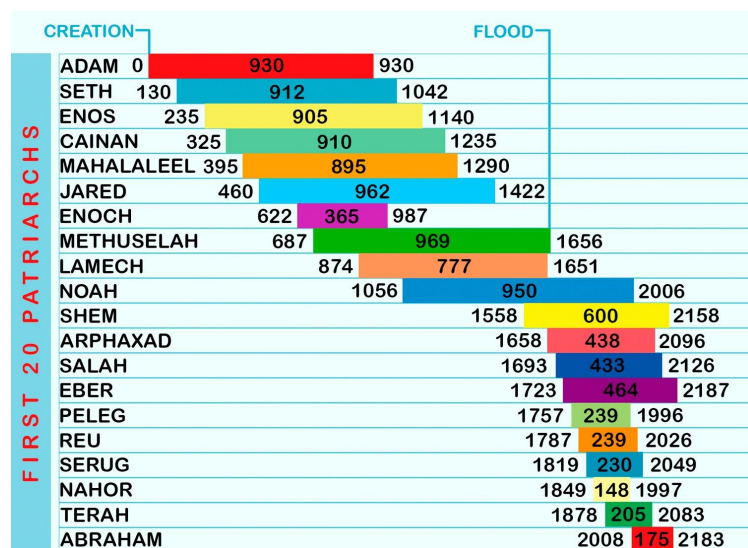
This chart (also repeated on the next page) lists the generations that followed Adam and Seth in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Only those names through which the Messiah can be traced are included. The colored lines depict the lifespan of each individual.



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well beyond Abraham.

To the left of the colored lines, the number of years “after creation” they were born is shown, and to the right of each colored line the year in which they died. So, Seth was born 130 years after creation, lived 912 years, and died 1,042 years after creation. This chart only traces Jesus’ lineage up until Abraham, but later I will present another that goes

During the great flood (1,656 years after creation when Noah was 600 years old Gen.7:6), all mankind except for Noah’s immediate family lost their lives (Gen. 7:23) because ***“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”*** (Gen 6:5). Afterwards, humanity “re-started” with these 8 people – Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives – and once again, for a brief time, there was no evil on the earth. But that didn’t last long. Idolatry (worship of false gods) soon crept in.

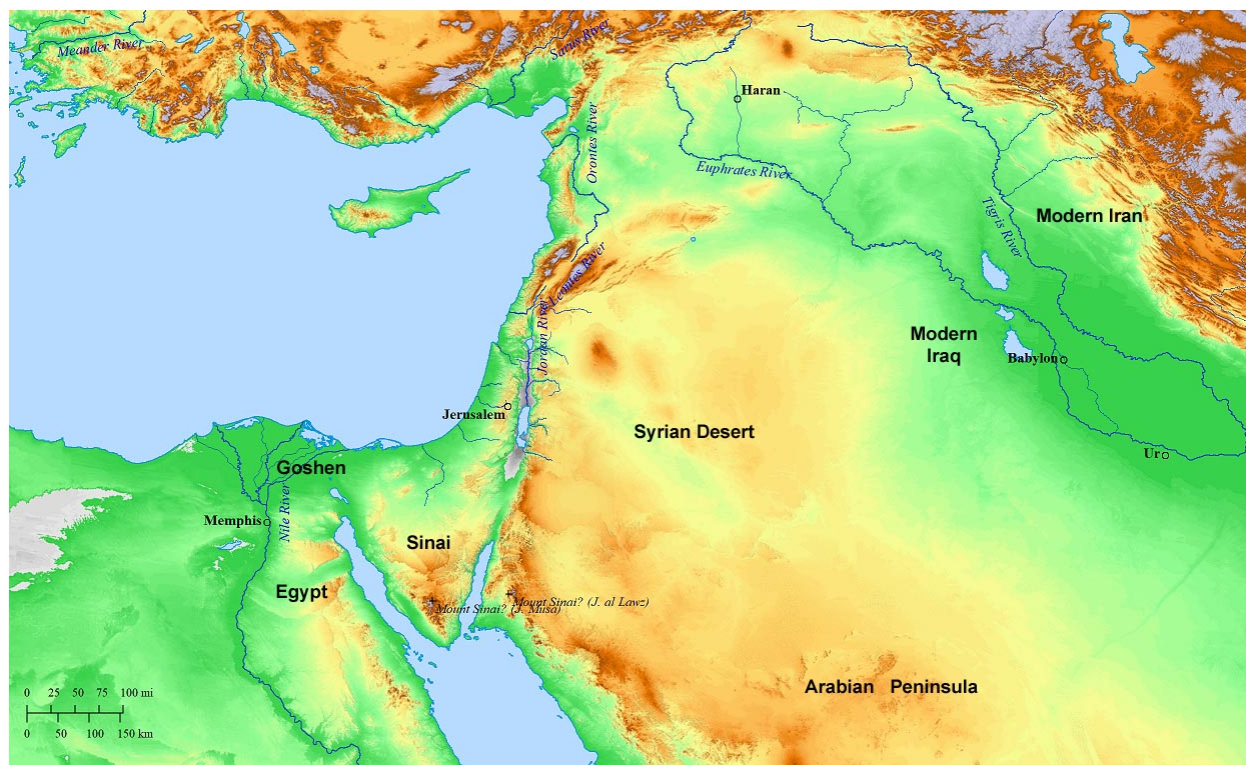
In fact, Rabbi Nissan Mindel, records that Nimrod, the king of Babel (later Babylon) had put Abram’s father, Terah, in charge of the worship of idols after they moved from Babel to Ur. Prior to the move from Babel to Ur we see the “Tower of Babel” incident recorded in Genesis, chapter 11. Foreseeing what might become of this proposed “tower project,” Nimrod built a new Palace in Ur of the Chaldees, and took his “right-hand man” Terah with him. When Abraham was born (named Abram at birth with the name change coming much later) Rabbi Mindel says that Nimrod had been told by his “seers” that the boy would take Nimrod’s place, so Nimrod sought to kill Abram. When Terah learned of the plot, he sent his son to live with Seth who still resided near Mt. Ararat.

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This map will help you position those area mentioned.



We have talked about Babylon: It is shown on this map to the right of “Modern Iraq.” Ur of the Chaldees is shown below and to the right Babylon. I mentioned that Seth lived near Mt. Ararat. It is not shown on this map but would be located above and to the right of Haran at the extreme top of the map. As you can see I have labeled modern names to help you situate this area in your mind. Modern Iraq’s eastern border is the Euphrates River and the southwestern border is the Gulf of Aqaba, the right side of the “Y” of water and the Red Sea (the blue water at the center bottom of this map).

According to Josephus, once Abram was a teenager, he came back to live with Terah, but was introduced to Nimrod as Terah’s nephew. It is thought that during the 13 or so years spent with Seth, Abram became well versed in the history before and after the flood, and was especially taught about God. The Bible tells us that Abram (born nine generations after Noah) found favor in God’s eyes, and that God appeared to him for the first time while he still living in

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Ur and told him to ***“get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show you.”*** (Genesis 12:1-3)

Instead of immediately leaving, history suggests that he tried to sway his father Terah away from idol worship and was actually having some success. We are also told that while Abram had been living with Seth's family, his older brother Haran died, leaving behind one son (Lot) and two daughters. Some 20 years later Abram's mother died and Terah then decided he wanted to take his family and leave and go to Haran. By this time Abram had married Haran's youngest daughter Sarai (later changed to Sarah) and his brother Nahor had married Haran's other daughter. Lot, Haran's youngest child, still lived with Terah, so he too made the trek to Haran (in the extreme north of the map on the previous page). The bad news is that Lot, who had been taught to worship idols from his early years, still clung to them.

About five years later, when Abram was 75 years old and his father Terah had died, God – for the second time – told Abram to move to Canaan. (Gen. 12:1-3) This time, he actually obeyed God and left Haran, moving toward Canaan. Notice that his instructions were to ***“get out of your country, from your family, and from your father's house...”*** Well, he obeyed part of that command. He did leave the area, but he took his nephew Lot with him. We know this decision ended up causing several problems, not the least of which was a war, as Lot continued to lean toward idolatry and the lure of a place called Sodom. This story is yet another example of our God's wisdom. It turns out He does always know best.

It was to Abram that a very important promise was made, at which time his name was changed to Abraham: ***“Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”*** (Gen. 18:18-19)

This promise was made 24 years after his relocation, when Abraham was 99 years old and God had recognized that he both feared Him and would follow His commandments. God

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told him that he would father a son and that *through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed* – and one year to the day later, Sarah (whose name has also been changed) bore Isaac. **Do not forget this promise made to the aged Abraham – it will serve as an important piece of the puzzle as we determine the exact year when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.**

In due time Abraham decided to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac. He sent a representative all the way back to Haran, where his family still lived, and a young woman named Rebekah (actually Isaac's first or second cousin) was selected. Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah as his wife, and twenty years later she gave birth to twin boys, Jacob and Esau. Prior to their birth, the Lord spoke to Rebekah and told her, *"Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."* (Gen. 25:23) We don't know if this is what influenced her, but we do know that she favored the younger child, Jacob, while Isaac favored Esau, the elder, the one traditionally to have been the recipient of the "birthright." The account of Esau selling his birthright to his younger brother Jacob is told in Genesis 25:29-34.

Then we read of Rebekah's plan to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, through which God's will was done and Jacob took his place in the lineage of Jesus. Naturally, this brought about hard feelings between Esau and Jacob, so Jacob was sent away to his mother's kinfolk in Haran, where he would work for Laban, his cousin. Just because Jacob was the "chosen" son, does not diminish the importance of Esau. His descendants were to become not only plentiful, but also to play a major part in the story of the Israelites once they settled in the Promised Land.

While Jacob was living in Haran, he fell in love with Rachel, one of two daughters of Laban, and agreed to work for Laban for seven years in exchange for the right to marry her. Laban agreed, but on the wedding night it was Leah that he was given, not Rachel. They say, "What goes around comes around," it is interesting that Jacob was first a party in deceiving his own father (the birthright blessing), and now became a victim himself. Laban explained away this deception by reminding Jacob that traditionally the elder daughter should always be married

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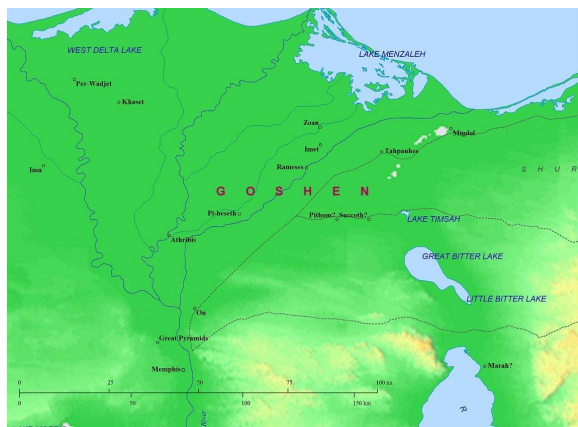
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first. Jacob had already promised to work for seven years, and now agreed to work another seven in order to marry the woman he truly loved. This doesn't mean that it was 14 years before Jacob took Rachel as his wife – that happened within a couple of weeks of his first union, but he honored his debt to Laban and continued to work until it was paid.

Over the course of the next few years, with Leah, Rachel, and two handmaids named Bilhah and Zilpah, Jacob fathered 12 male children and one daughter, Dinah. Those twelve sons would become what were later called “The Twelve Tribes of Israel”: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph and Benjamin. It is with these sons that Jacob will leave Canaan and go to Egypt to escape a severe famine, thus setting in motion the events of the book of Exodus.

Jacob made it very obvious that Joseph, the first-born son of his beloved Rachel, was his favorite, and the young man's relationship with his older brothers suffered because of it. It didn't help that Joseph talked openly to his brothers about his dreams. In one, they were harvesting sheaves in the field when suddenly Joseph's sheaf rose and stood upright, while the other eleven sheaves of his brothers gathered around and bowed down to it. Of course none of the brothers understood this, but we know this dream was foretelling the position Joseph would one day hold in the court of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Their only reaction was jealousy and hatred for their little brother, resulting in a plot to do away with him.

Nowhere is God's hand more obvious than in the life of this young man named Joseph,



betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery only to end up in Egypt as the Pharaoh's “right hand man.” His careful planning before an extensive famine and his management of Egypt's resources during that famine made the Pharaoh wealthy and powerful beyond measure, and earned Joseph a place of high esteem in the eyes of one of the most powerful men on earth at that time. So

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much so that, when the famine had devastated the land where Jacob lived, the Pharaoh invited Joseph's family to come live in a choice region of the Egyptian empire, the land of Goshen (shown near the center of the map of northern Egypt on the previous page). This area offered excellent soil for tilling and plenty of well-watered grazing land for large herds of sheep. Joseph's family prospered in Goshen, and since Joseph had warned them that all shepherds were detestable to the Egyptians, they began to grow crops of dates, fruits, wheat and barley instead. By the time the famine was over, the Israelites were well established and prospering in their new home.

Genesis 46 details the move to Egypt and the descendents of Jacob involved in it. This chart is one of several I have created for this study to help us better understand the material. This particular chart lists the 70 souls mentioned in Genesis 46 that left Canaan to go live in Egypt. The twelve sons of Jacob, arranged according to their mother, are printed in boldface type with their sons and daughters listed in the same cell. This chart does not include Jacob himself (only those who came to Egypt with Jacob), so the addition of his name brings us to the total of 70 mentioned in Genesis 46 and again in the first few verses of Exodus.

Notice too, the number includes Joseph and his two sons, even though they were already living in Egypt at this time. Two of the sons of Judah (Er and

Those who left Canaan toward Egypt	Offspring	by Mother
Reuben , Hanoch, Phallu, Hezron, Carmi	5	
Simeon , Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, Shaul	7	
Levi , Gershon, Kohath, Merari	4	
Judah , Er, Onan, Shelah, Pharez, Zerah: (but Er and Onan died before Egypt) & Pharez' sons: Hezron and Hamul.	8	
Issacher , Tola, Phuvah, Job, Shimron.	5	
Zebulun , Sered, Elon, Jahleel.	4	
<i>Leah's sons and daughters totaled:</i>		33
Gad , Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, Areli	8	
Asher , Jimnah, Ishuah, Isui, Beriah; and Beriah's sons: Heber & Malchiel	7	
<i>Zilpah's sons totaled: (Leah's handmaid)</i>		15
Joseph , Manasseh and Ephraim (Born in Egypt)	3	
Benjamin , Belah, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.	11	
<i>Rachel's Sons totaled:</i>		14
Dan , Hushim	2	
Naphtali , Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, Shillem	5	
<i>Bilhah's sons totaled:</i>		7
Totals:	69	69

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Onan) died on the journey into Egypt, but are listed among the 70 because they started the trip with them. Of course, there were many more than these 69 people in the caravan across the desert. We are told that each family brought their entire household, which would have included wives, servants, and children. It is thought by some commentators that each family may have brought as many as 30 or more people with them, as well as their flocks, cattle, and household possessions.

Before we move into our study, let's discuss authorship of the book of Exodus. Moses is certainly the best qualified person to have written it. For one thing, his unique education among the upper royalty of Egypt points to a high level of literacy. This fact is certified by Stephen just before his death in Acts 7:22: ***“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.”*** But there is also some “internal evidence” – material found within the text of Exodus itself – that adds support for Moses' authorship. For example, there are many conversations, events, and geographical details that might only have been known by an eyewitness or participant in the events being described. In chapter 24:4, when Moses was alone with the Creator on Mount Sinai, it is said, ***“Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said.”*** (NIV) Who else could have spoken of that private audience he had with the Lord?

There are other Old Testament references to ***“the law of Moses”*** – Joshua 1:7 and 1 Kings 2:3 for example – indicating that those rules and regulations they studied and honored were written by him. But the most compelling evidence is Jesus Himself when, referring to a quote from Exodus 20:12 and 21:17, He said, ***“For Moses said...”*** (Mark 7:10). This confirms authorship, if not of the entire book, certainly of that passage.

So, does this mean Moses is the sole author of Exodus? Not necessarily. He is often credited with writing all five of the books of the Torah, but I agree with those who suggest that Joshua (or someone else) may have finished them – certainly those parts that occur after Moses' death. But this I truly believe: regardless of who may have helped or provided details, Moses surely had a hand in the writing of this book in particular. And, of course we also know that since it is a part of Holy Scripture, it is inspired by God and accurate in every way.

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Some common facts about the book of Exodus:

1. The title “Exodus” comes from the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Hebrew Bible (including the Apocrypha) that was published for Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt in the 3rd and 2nd centuries AD. It is, of course, derived from the primary event found in the book – the deliverance from slavery and departure of the Israelite nation out of Egypt by the hand of Yahweh, the God of their forefathers.
2. The book roughly covers a period of about 120 years, from shortly before Moses’ birth to his death just before Joshua led the people into Canaan.
3. Moses’ life seems to be divided into three equal time periods:
 - a. He was 40 years old when he fled from Egypt to live in Midian with Jethro, his father-in-law.
 - b. He was about 80 years old when God spoke to him from the burning bush and sent him back to Egypt.
 - c. He died on Mt. Nebo at the age of 120 years just after turning control of the Israelites over to Joshua.

Exodus is so much more than a series of exciting stories. It is of value to the modern reader for several reasons. For one thing, through it we are able to see God describe His own character, and witness how He directly dealt with the Israelites until they became conformed to His way and He could call them “His people.” We see the fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob begins to unfold. And we come to understand how God established Israel as a theocratic nation – one in which priests rule in the name of God – through His covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai.

In what other book are there more examples of God’s supreme power and majesty! I continue to be awestruck by it as I read of the 10 plagues He brought upon Egypt, and how He passed over the Israelites when he brought about the death of the firstborn in Egyptian homes. How He parted the Red Sea, then appeared in fearsome majesty on Mt. Sinai and gave Moses the 10 Commandments. Or how He resided in the tabernacle, and led His people with pillars of cloud and fire through the desert to the Promised Land.

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All of these events from Exodus form a foundation for the Jewish faith, and provide crucial background context to help future readers understand the entire Bible's message of redemption. Actually, the frequency of references to the book of Exodus in both the Old and New Testaments, including those by Jesus Himself, testify to its importance.

All believers in Christ must be redeemed in order to be consecrated before God. Under the Mosaic Covenant, this was accomplished by annually sacrificing unblemished animals according to specific regulations in order to have their sins covered, or borne, by the death of that animal, for that period of time. The author of Hebrews tells us in chapter 10:3-4, ***“But those sacrifices were an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”*** But Jesus became the *perfect* Lamb of God and His sacrifice DOES take away our sin — permanently! Or, as it is said a few verses later, ***“When He sacrificed Himself on our behalf, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”***

So, a study of Exodus will show us how God's plan for our salvation was in play from the beginning. Everything fits together beautifully from the time of Moses to the time of Christ because this plan was designed by the Almighty God.

Let's get started with this amazing story.